

Undergraduate Commencement May 19, 2017

*I've got my ticket for the long way 'round
The one with the prettiest of views
It's got mountains, it's got rivers, it's got sights to give you shivers
But it sure would be prettier with you
When you're gone
When you're gone
We're gonna miss you when you're gone
We're gonna miss you by your walk
We're gonna miss you by your talk, oh
We're gonna miss you when you're gone
When you're gone
When you're gone
We're gonna miss you when you're gone
We're gonna miss you by your walk
We're gonna miss you by your talk, oh
Southern's gonna miss you when you're gone*

The class of 2017 holds a very special place in my heart. This is the first graduating class of my new Southern presidency. It's an enthusiastic class, as I've found during my regular forays out and about on campus.

You haven't been shy to welcome me and ask me to take a selfie or do the dab. I've been asked to be tie dyed for charity.

And one of you asked me to go through the strenuous workout regimen required of a national Ninja Warrior contestant ...that didn't work out so great...I was aching for weeks afterward!

While we will certainly miss you when you're gone, I know that Southern has prepared you well to achieve happiness and success.

Because you, our soon-to-be graduates, are the reason that all the rest of us are here, and when you succeed, we all succeed.

We're gonna miss you when you're gone, BUT you should know that...

- You are surrounded by people who care about you and who love you.
- You are prepared to make it through the uncertainty and the challenges that are sure to come.
- You are here today because your commitment, energy, and passion will ensure your future success.
- Sure, you're going to make mistakes, we all do – but you will learn from them and be the better for it!

- You are here today because you've set goals and you have achieved them. You've made sacrifices, and they have paid off – you are here today – graduated...almost!
- We're gonna miss you when you're gone – but we're sending you off with a great deal of Owl PRIDE!

If there's one thought that I'd like you to carry forward from today, it's this... relationships matter...

People, not things, matter.

As you know, I'm committed to the pursuit of social justice, both within our own community and beyond.

Indeed, one of my goals is to have Southern recognized as the social justice university of Connecticut.

I want to see the concept of social justice inform everything we do at Southern, because it's about equity, fairness, and a level playing field – all of which should be part of higher education culture.

At the core of social justice is compassion... it is rooted in people, in community, in an ethic of care, understanding and acceptance...

It is rooted in relationships and, yes, in “being intentionally kind” to one another – sometimes with individuals you may not like or understand.

So as you leave us today with your well-earned diplomas, I challenge each of and every one of you to be intentionally kind to others, throughout your long, happy and productive lives.

Finally, I must end, as I always like to do, with a short story:

A college president discovers on his appointment calendar a graduate who is back to campus for his twenty-fifth reunion. “I just wanted to take a second,” said the graduate, “to thank you for the inspirational advice you gave me at Commencement 25 years ago!”

“Why, thank you,” replied the college president, who, of course, could neither remember the graduate nor what he had said. “But perhaps you could refresh my memory. What did I say that inspired you so much?”

At that, the graduate leaned forward in his chair, looked earnestly at the President, and said, “I’ve tried to live my life by these words: As I came up to the stage to get my degree, you shook my hand and said, ‘Keep moving. Keep moving!’”

So, graduates, go out and “KEEP MOVING!”

Congratulations, Class of 2017!